



Confederates at Fort Davis

Anticipating the outbreak of a “war between the states,” General David Twiggs, who was in command of all U. S. (federal) troops in Texas, surrendered U. S. army forts and supplies to Texas in February of 1861. The following month, Texas officially seceded from the Union and joined the Confederate States of America. In April 1861, the Civil War began.

The U.S. troops stationed at Fort Davis had to leave because Texas was now part of the Confederacy. Because they had trouble getting wagons to carry them and their supplies to the coast, they left most of their supplies for the Confederates. The troops did, however, cut down the flagpole at Fort Davis because they did not want a Confederate flag to fly over the fort.

The first Confederate soldiers to occupy Fort Davis suffered from lack of provisions. Clothing and food were in short supply. In particular, the men needed trousers. One soldier wrote about a tailor at the fort cutting up some wagon sheets left behind by the U. S. troops and making them into pants for the men.

The Confederate soldiers at Fort Davis encountered separate adversaries: Comanches or Apaches in west Texas and U. S. (federal) troops in New Mexico. This was an almost impossible task because during the time Confederates occupied Fort Davis, they only averaged 40-60 men. There were rarely enough men at the fort to carry out routine duties.

Not all Indians, however, were hostile to the soldiers and some even helped the Confederates. But one Apache, Chief Nicholas, deceived the Confederates by claiming to be interested in peace. He even signed a peace treaty with the Confederates, but two months later he stole and killed a number of Fort Davis animals. A small party of Confederates under Lieutenant Reuben E. Mays followed the raiding Apaches into the Big Bend, but they rode into an ambush and were all killed except the guide.



Fort Davis played a part in the Confederate invasion of New Mexico by serving as a supply and communications post. After Confederate troops were defeated in New Mexico and began retreating to San Antonio, Fort Davis became a medical receiving station for the sick and wounded.

By July of 1862, U.S. (federal) troops—volunteers from California—had reached El Paso, and the Confederates had no choice but to abandon their forts in western Texas. In early August, the last Confederate troops left Fort Davis, returning to San Antonio. A few weeks later, a detachment of U. S.

Cavalry volunteers rode into Fort Davis, staying just long enough to raise the U.S. flag. For the next five years, Fort Davis remained abandoned.

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Answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think General Twiggs surrendered Fort Davis and the other federal forts in Texas even before Texas had officially seceded from the Union and joined the Confederate States of America? For additional information on General Twiggs, look in places like the *Texas Handbook*.
2. What do you think it would have been like to be a Confederate soldier at Fort Davis? Write a letter to a friend back home telling him or her how you feel and about a typical day.
3. Why do you think the Chief Nicholas deceived the Confederates by claiming to be interested in peace? How would you feel if you had been an Apache at that time?
4. What might be some reasons why the Confederates left Fort Davis and retreated to San Antonio?